

# Johannes Ockeghem

## *Presque transi ung peu moins qu'estre mort a 3*

Edition and comments by  
Peter Woetmann Christoffersen

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<http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/CH/CH077.html>

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This edition is extracted from the online project *The Copenhagen Chansonnier and the Loire Valley' chansonniers*, which consists of linked html-files and a great number of single PDF editions. It can be accessed at <http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/>.

Each html-file about a song contains lists of sources, and edition and translation of the poetic texts, discussion of the main sources and comments on text and music. Separate files hold lists of contents and descriptions of the sources. Other files contain papers and notes on related topics. The online edition offers many cross references and links to online facsimile editions. These links had to be simplified in the present edition.

Each version of a song is regarded as a valid performance by a scribe/musician, and therefore they are published separately. In most cases there will be no attempts to imagine the intentions of the composer or to reconstruct exactly what the composer had written when the music left his pen. Rather the aim is to interpret the written music in largely the same way as 15th century performers may have read it. Many details, which in one source are different from other sources, must be accepted by the editor as valid elements in a performance of the actual source. Sources marked by an asterisk \* are included in the edition.

*Sigla of the related 'Loire Valley' chansonniers*

Copenhagen	Copenhagen, The Royal Library, MS Thott 291 8° <a href="http://www.kb.dk/permalink/2006/manus/702/dan/0+recto/">http://www.kb.dk/permalink/2006/manus/702/dan/0+recto/</a>
Dijon	Dijon, Bibliothèque Municipale, Ms. 517 <a href="http://patrimoine.bm-dijon.fr/pleade/img-viewer/MS00517/viewer.html">http://patrimoine.bm-dijon.fr/pleade/img-viewer/MS00517/viewer.html</a>
Laborde	Washington D.C., Library of Congress, MS M2.1 L25 Case (Laborde Chansonnier) <a href="https://www.loc.gov/resource/ihas.200152631.0/?sp=1">https://www.loc.gov/resource/ihas.200152631.0/?sp=1</a>
Leuven	Leuven, Alamire Foundation, Manuscript without shelf number (Leuven Chansonnier) <a href="http://depot.lias.be/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE9381778">http://depot.lias.be/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE9381778</a>
Nivelle	Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Rés. Vmc. ms. 57 (Chansonnier Nivelle de la Chaussée) <a href="http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b55007270r/f1.image">http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b55007270r/f1.image</a>
Wolfenbüttel	Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Codex Guelf. 287 Extravag. <a href="http://diglib.hab.de/wdb.php?dir=mss/287-extrav">http://diglib.hab.de/wdb.php?dir=mss/287-extrav</a>

*Text source*

Berlin 78.B.17	Berlin, Staatsliche Museen der Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Kupferstichkabinett, Ms. 78.B.17 (Chansonnier Rohan)
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*Literature*

Löpelmann 1923	M. Löpelmann (ed.), <i>Die Liederhandschrift des Cardinals de Rohan</i> (Gesellschaft für romanische Litteratur, Band 44) Göttingen 1923
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*Presque transi ung peu moins qu'estre mort* 3v · Ockeghem, Johannes

*Appearance in the group of related chansonniers:*

\*Dijon ff. 55v-57 »Presque transi ung peu moins qu'estre mort« 3v Ockeghem

\*Laborde ff. 81v-83 »Presque transi ung peu mains qu'estre mort« 3v

*Text:* Bergerette; full text in both sources; also in Berlin 78.B.17, f. 152v, ed.: Löpelmann 1923, p. 284. After Dijon and Laborde:

Presque transi ung peu moins qu'estre mort,  
vivant en dueil sans avoir nul confort (1)  
voir l'on me peut eslieus de fortune (2)  
qui sans cesser pis qu'aultre me fortune (3)  
et me combas de plus fort en plus fort.

Helas, je suis contre mon veuil envie, (4)  
et si n'est riens dont tant j'aie d'envie  
que de povoir veoir ma fin bien prouchaine.

Morir ne puis et tousjours m'y convie,  
et m'est bien tart que du tout je desvie  
a celle fin que soie hors de paine. (5)

Il m'est advis que la mort me tient tort, (6)  
quant autrement elle ne fait son effort  
de moi vengier de ma vie importune  
car je languis sans avoir joie aucune  
par mon maleur qui me devour et mort.

*Presque transi ung peu moins qu'estre mort,  
vivant en dueil sans avoir nul confort  
voir l'on me peut eslieus de fortune  
qui sans cesser pis qu'aultre me fortune  
et me combas de plus fort en plus fort.*

Nearly gone, only a little bit from being dead,  
living in sorrow without having any consolation  
I can be seen as chosen by Fortune  
who incessantly makes my fortune worse than others  
and attacks me with stronger and stronger blows.

Alas, I am alive against my will,  
and there is nothing I wish for so much  
as to be able to see my quickly approaching end.

I cannot die and yet am always attracted,  
and it is quite late for me as I leave everything  
for this end, which may be free of pain.

I think that Death does me wrong,  
when otherwise she makes no effort  
to punish me for my painful life  
for I languish without having any joy  
due to my grief which devours and kills me.

Nearly gone, only a little bit from being dead,  
living in sorrow without having any consolation  
I can be seen as chosen by Fortune  
who incessantly makes my fortune worse than others  
and attacks me with stronger and stronger blows.

1) Dijon, line 2, "vivant en deul ..."

2) Dijon, line 3, missing in MS, there is simply no space for it! After Laborde

3) Dijon, line 4, "Qui sans cesser puis"

4) Dion, line 6, "... mon veul envie"

5) Laborde, line 11, "a celle fin que je soye ..."

6) Laborde, line 12, "... la me tient tort"

In addition some minor differences in spelling.

*Evaluation of the sources:*

Copied twice by the Dijon scribe after the same exemplar, first in the Dijon chansonnier where the song belonged to its original repertory, and some years later he added it to the Laborde chansonnier.<sup>1</sup> He was obviously somewhat confused by the disposition and the range of the two lower voices, when he entered the song into Dijon, and he did not take

1 Cf. the descriptions of the MSS at <http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/>.

time to prepare the layout of the music with his usual care. He began by notating the tenor in a C4 clef, but changed it at once into a C5 clef without erasure of the first written. This clef was already in the next staff exchanged with a F3 clef, which was used for the remainder of the part. The contratenor is in an extended range, *A-g'*; in the song's first section it is notated in a F3 clef, but changes into a C3 clef for the couplets. This change of clef and its high range in the *couplets* has apparently induced the scribe to introduce a one flat signature from bar 33. Likewise, in the upper voice he has put a one flat signature in the last two staves of the first section (bb. 16.2-32). The upper voice flats may be caused by his recognizing the needed inflections in the cadence bb. 15-16. The hexachordal signatures in the contratenor, however, are impossible to explain. He also had to skip the third line of text in the upper voice, simply because the notes did not leave any space for the words. He had not foreseen the situation. All in all, this copy seems to indicate that he was not familiar with the song and did not really succeed in his first try.

The later Laborde copy is much better – without spurious key signatures and nearly without errors. He carefully disposed his writing on the very small pages of this chansonnier in such a way that there was room for all the text, and he was more careful with his spelling (see above). The differences in the music are very few: A single change of a dotted figure into a *semibrevis* and the usual variability in the use of coloration (S bb. 49.3-50.1 and C b. 11.1-2 without coloration; C bb. 10.1, 26.3 and 29.3 with coloration).

#### *Comments on text and music:*

The poem is an extremely depressed bergerette in artful, rich rimes. The poet longs for death without specifying the reasons for his dark mood. At the end of the *tierce* the poet appears to run out of steam and becomes quite repetitive in his banalities.

The low-range Phrygian musical setting adheres to the mood of the words, and all three voices appear to be conceived with the words in mind. The tenor, in particular, is close to the words, and it has the strongest line of melody. Its range is very low (*G-c'*), and it is combined with a contratenor in the same range, which is placed mostly above the tenor. This forces the contratenor to extend its range in the first section, up to *e'*.

Normally, bergerette settings obtain their musical effect by virtue of their contrasting the repeated couplets with the long first section. In “Presque transi” this contrast only appears in the poem by the change of rime words, not in its mood. Similarly, there appears to be no contrast in the written music: No change of mensuration, not even a renewed indication of tempus perfectum, nor of hexachordal signature (in the Laborde copy), and superius and tenor seem to proceed in the same track. Only the change of clef in the contratenor signals a difference. In performance the contrast is audible. The black notation of the first two bars of the couplets signals very discreetly a double time, which creates tension in the remainder of the section. The tenor restricts its range to an octave, *c-c'*, which forces the contratenor into an even higher range, *c-g'*, to keep its position above the tenor. The change of clef from F3 to C3 may very well indicate that another singer here has to take over. The sound of the voices and subtle changes of rhythm assure the contrast in relation to the first section. It is not immediately visible in the written music, and it may have led the Dijon scribe astray in his first copy.

The memorable opening phrase of the tenor and the ability of the song's motives to combine with each other compelled Ockeghem to use some of its elements as points of departure in composing of the four-part *Missa Mi mi*.<sup>2</sup>

2 See further Haruyo Miyazaki, 'New light on Ockeghem's Missa 'Mi-mi'', *Early Music* 1985 pp. 367-375, Fabrice Fitch, *Johannes Ockeghem: Masses and Models*. Paris 1997, pp. 159-170, Johannes Ockeghem (ed. Jaap van Benthem and Gayle Kirkwood), *Missa My my* (Masses and Mass Sections, fascicle III,2), Utrecht 1998 pp. XII-XIII and David Fallows, *A Catalogue of Polyphonic Songs*, 1415-1480. Oxford 1999, p. 327.

Dijon no. 47

Dijon, Bibliothèque Municipale, MS 517, ff. 55V-57: Okeghem

Ockeghem, *Presque transi un peu moins qu'estre mort*

Laborde no. 67

Washington D.C., Library of Congress, MS M2.1 L25 Case, ff. 81V-83

[Superius]

Mensura =  $\text{♩}$

1.4. Pres - que tran - si un - g peu moins qu'es -  
 3. Il m'est ad - vis que la mort me

1.4. Pres - que tran - si un - g peu moins  
 3. Il m'est ad - vis que la mort

1.4. Pres - que tran - si un - g peu moins  
 3. Il m'est ad - vis que la mort

5  
 - tre mort, vi - vant en - dueil sans a - voir  
 tient tort, quant au - tre - ment elle ne fait

qu'es - tre mort, vi - vant en - dueil sans a - voir  
 me tient tort, quant au - tre - ment elle ne fait

qu'es - tre mort, vi - vant en - dueil sans a - voir  
 me tient tort, quant au - tre - ment elle ne fait

10  
 nul con - fort <sup>1)</sup> voir de l'on me  
 son ef - fort fort moi ven -

nul con - fort voir de l'on me  
 son ef - fort fort moi ven -

nul con - fort voir de l'on me  
 son ef - fort fort moi ven -

14  
 peut es - li - eus de for - tu - ne  
 gler de ma vi - e\_im por - tu - ne

peut es - li - eus de for - tu - ne  
 gler de ma vi - e\_im por - tu - ne

peut es - li - eus de for - tu - ne  
 gler de ma vie im - por - tu - ne

19

qui sans ces - ser pis sans qu'aul - tre me for - tu -  
car je lan - guis sans a - voir joie au - cu -

qui sans ces - ser pis sans qu'aul - tre me for - tu -  
car je lan - guis sans a - voir joie au - cu -

qui sans ces - ser pis sans qu'aul - tre me for - tu -  
car je lan - guis sans a - voir joie au - cu -

24

ne et me com - - - - - bas  
ne par mon ma - - - - - leur

ne et me com - bas  
ne par mon ma - leur

ne et me com - bas  
ne par mon ma - leur

28

de plus fort en plus et fort.  
qui me de - vour et mort.

de plus fort en plus et fort.  
qui me de - vour et mort.

de plus fort en plus et fort.  
qui me de - vour et mort.

- 1) Dijon, Superius, text 1, bb. 13-17, line 3 "veoir ... fortune" is missing (lack of space).
- 2) Dijon, Superius, b. 17.1-2, brevis-semibrevis (staff change).
- 3) Dijon, Superius, bb. 16.2-32, key signatures of one flat in two staves (error).
- 4) Dijon, Superius, b. 22.1, two semibreves.
- 5) Dijon, Contratenor, bb. 33-51, key signatures of one flat in two staves (error).
- 6) Laborde, Superius, b. 44.3, semibrevis e'.
- 7) Dijon, Tenor, b. 51.3 (2a volta) semibreves g-a, minima g, semibrevis a, minima f (error).

33

2a. He - las, je suis con - tre mon vueil en - vi - e, et et  
2b. Mo - rir ne puis et tous - jours m'y con - vi - e, et

2a. He - las, je suis con - tre mon vueil en - vi - e, et et  
2b. Mo - rir ne puis et tous - jours m'y con - vi - e, et

5)

2a. He - las, je suis con - tre mon vueil en - vi - e, et et  
2b. Mo - rir ne puis et tous - jours m'y con - vi - e, et

39

si n'est riens dont tant j'ai - e d'en - vi - e que  
m'est bien tart que du tout je des - vi - e a

si n'est riens dont tant j'ai - e d'en - vi - e que  
m'est bien tart que du tout je des - vi - e a

6)

si n'est riens dont tant j'ai - e d'en - vi - e que  
m'est bien tart que du tout je des - vi - e a

45

de po - voir veoir ma fin bien hors prou - chai - - -  
cel - le fin que soi - e hors de pai - - -

de po - voir veoir ma fin bien hors prou - chai - - -  
cel - le fin que soi - e hors de pai - - -

de po - voir veoir ma fin bien hors prou - chai - - -  
cel - le fin que soi - e hors de pai - - -

51

1. ne. 2. ne.  
ne. ne.  
ne. ne.

7)

ne. ne.